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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

50X1-HUM

COUNTRY

Czechoslovakia

SUBJECT

Gradual Nationalization of Pharmacies/Drug
Situation, Winter 1952-53/ MEDIKA Organization
in Brno.

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Gradual Nationalization of Pharmacies

2. "Certain pharmacies in Czechoslovakia managed to survive the early wave of Communist nationalization in 1948 and 1949. The Communists probably spared these specialized private enterprises because they were reluctant to replace qualified pharmacists with inexperienced political appointees - the routine in other branches of trade. Pharmacists in Brno used to say that they were spared because the late Comrade Jan Slings, who suffered from serious stomach trouble, consumed vast quantities of drugs.
3. "However, the Communist regime was determined to get under its control eventually both private pharmacists and the managers of former German pharmaceutical enterprises. This end was gradually attained through compulsory political indoctrination and various CP and STS pressure tactics. The pharmacists were unable to resist without jeopardizing their personal safety and freedom. The majority by 1949 were either CP members or candidates. They had to attend CP meetings and take an active part in Party life. The Communist authorities assigned such men to be employees in the remaining private pharmacies to watch those pharmacists who had so far refused to give in.
4. "This was the situation until about 1950, when all pharmacies throughout Czechoslovakia were nationalized and made part of the MEDIKA national enterprise.

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owned a pharmacy in Brno-Kralovo Pole was now working as a simple employee in a nationalized pharmacy in Zidenice, his boss being a youngster without pharmaceutical qualifications. This has been the common fate of all the well established pharmacists [redacted] in Brno.

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6. "In one pharmaceutical factory in Brno, now under national management, all the laboratories are busy making drugs for export in large quantities to Korea and China. Most of these products are exported within the "Aid to Korea" program, as gifts, free of charge. Another major part of the output is exported to the USSR. Only the leftovers are allocated to the domestic market. As a result, there is such an acute shortage of some current preparations that prescription patients wander from one MEDIKA pharmacy to another, often trying in distant towns. They finally return the prescriptions to their doctor who must figure out a similar drug for which the pharmacies will be more apt to have the necessary ingredients.
7. "In many cases the new medicines put on the market by nationalized laboratories have been found deficient and withdrawn from distribution. In other cases such preparations have proved merely ineffective. Some have been found downright dangerous for the patient's life. This was true of a glucose preparation made by the national firm SPOFA, it caused convulsions.
8. "Some former private pharmacists still have small supplies of foreign medicines. Since the Minister of Health started a violent campaign against imported drugs, they have had to handle them carefully lest they be denounced by the personnel whom the CP has planted in their firms to watch them.
9. "Chemists who try to obtain Western drugs, even if for their personal use only and not for sale, run the risk of imprisonment. The wife [redacted] was suffering from advanced TB. Her doctor recommended a preparation of Isonicotinil-Hydracid in a last attempt to save her life. This preparation is obtainable abroad under various names, e.g. Vederon, Tulicon and Isolicin. My friend wrote a personal letter to friends in Switzerland, enclosing the prescription and asking them to send the medicine. His letter was censored, and the next day STB agents warned him to stop sending such requests abroad unless he wanted to land in jail. When the chemist tried to explain that all he wanted to do was save his wife's life, the agents argued that the drug in question had not yet been tested by Czechoslovak scientists and therefore no patient's life in Czechoslovakia should be jeopardized by applying it. Soon after this warning the chemist was transferred as a minor employee to another nationalized pharmacy and was reprimanded personally by the director of MEDIKA in Brno. His wife died a few months later.
10. The MEDIKA in Brno
"The head of the MEDIKA Directorate in Brno is PH. Mgr (Magister Pharmaciae') (fnu) SEDLAK, [redacted]. He has been responsible for the transfer of former private pharmacists to minor positions and for drawing up unfavorable cadres reports on them. The chairman of the TU Council within the Directorate is a former charwoman. All MEDIKA employees have to attend compulsory indoctrination courses conducted by young 'magisters' who have just graduated. They try to make up for their lack of scientific knowledge by their zeal in Party activities.
11. "The MEDIKA shops also sell baby food. These are available only against special coupons. In winter 1952 the supplies of special milk for babies were so low that most of the time it was unavailable, even against special coupons.

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